

RE-ORDERING PERFORMANCE:  
FINDING JOY AND FREEDOM IN  
*OH WHAT A LOVELY WAR!*

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## Abstract

The following document is an exploration of pursuing ease and joy in the Theatre@York's production of *Oh, What a Lovely War*. This support document gives literal meaning to the phenomenon of stage fright, defines the psychological reasoning behind the reaction of the autonomic nervous system, and tracks the creation of a new methodology based on the acting philosophies of David Mamet, Uta Hagen, and Stanislavski. The process includes pursuing full embodiment of character, creating achievable goals and building a new relationship with the audience. The ultimate goal is to create a new performance methodology that will result in both rehearsal and performance being a joyful experience.

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## **Introduction**

The primary focus of my performance research within the graduate acting program at York University is combating stage fright and examining the ways in which such anxiety can inhibit full performance potential, spontaneity and enjoyment. I have begun to explore and create a new performance methodology that will re-order the framework I have relied upon, and allow me to begin to embrace the chaotic nature of theatre. In the past it has been difficult to assess the factors that lead to the symptoms that I refer to as stage fright. In my thesis research I will illuminate the psychological reaction created by the central nervous system when an actor is on stage and the ways in which I have begun to surmount its negative effects.

In my experience stage fright can be described in the following way: peripheral vision is inhibited (i.e. tunnel vision), there are sensations of vertigo, extreme imbalance, stomach pain, and shallowness of breath. These symptoms together describe the fight or flight response. This is a response by one's body to any extreme situation, that the body perceives as dangerous. The biological foundation behind these symptoms is explainable, but the manifestation of the response itself is not always predictable, nor appropriate. While I do not always experience these symptoms, they occur often enough to warrant a change in my habitual patterns, with a strong focus on building confidence in the work. The purpose behind building confidence in the work is as a reminder, when and if these symptoms do arise, that I know what it is I am doing on stage and can fulfill my responsibility as an actor.

My research can be divided into two specific areas: the physiological reasoning behind irrational fear (such as experiencing the fight or flight response in what should be considered a non-dangerous circumstance) and secondly, the ways in which I might embrace the chaotic nature of performance. The second area of exploration will involve the exploration of acting techniques that I have not previously utilized. Encompassed in this portion of my research will be the re-examination of acting texts of which I had previously formed opinions, whether those were negative or positive. The goal for this is to revise my notions of performance, void of previous judgments or expectations.

Previously, my actor preparation has relied upon imagination. This is not a bad thing; however, it resulted in my feeling rather vague on stage. All actors need to explore their process. I had become comfortable in the results of mine, without realizing my process may have been contributing to my growing insecurity and discontentment on stage. Theatre@ York's production of *Oh, What A Lovely War* is an ideal place for me to begin to develop this new process. Because of the nature of the show, I will be playing 11 characters. This is an extraordinary opportunity for me to utilize various acting techniques and observe the results. I will chart these experiences in both rehearsal and performance, by monitoring my confidence level, my ability to stay focused to the task at hand, how well I embody each character, and the belief I have in the world I have built for them. My goal is to act impulsively, with a connection from my mind to my body, without prioritizing judgment (my own and the audience).

Because my ultimate goal is to develop a new and useful process, my body of literature consists mostly of acting texts that outline technique. I have been trying to focus on those authors and theatre practitioners whose philosophies seem to highlight the practical methods of preparation. David Mamet has been hugely influential for me, both in texts he wrote (*True and False*, *Three Uses of the Knife*) and texts inspired by his philosophy (*A Practical Handbook for the Actor*). I also have been exploring the theatre games designed by Viola Spolin. She frequently spoke on the “approval/disapproval syndrome” that plagues the theatre:

The first step towards playing is feeling personal freedom. Before we can play (experience) we must be free to do so. [...] In a culture where approval/disapproval has become the predominant regulator of effort and position, and often the substitute for love, our personal freedoms are dissipated. We must wander daily through the wish to be loved and the fear of rejection before we can be productive. Categorized as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ from birth we become so enmeshed with the tenuous treads of approval/disapproval that we are creatively paralyzed. (Spolin xi ).

The nature of her argument has been useful in my attempt to develop a positive attitude towards performance. The other texts that I have reintroduced myself to are Sonia Moore’s works on Stanislavski wherein Moore simplifies his canon of writing into a body of workable exercises. Uta Hagen described a list of 9 W’s, or 9 questions that actors should ask of their characters to ensure they have a strong foundation on which to build context. These “W’s” are: Who Am I?; What time is it?; Where am I?; What surrounds me?; What are the given circumstances?; What is

my relationship?; What do I want?; What is in my way?; and What do I do to get what I want?

Once an actor has explored these questions they should be able to “explore what we do about our responses to nature, not just how we feel about it,” (Hagen 109). This quote resonated with me because I am searching for active motivations to rely on, as opposed to the reproduction of feelings. Reinvestigating and applying these principles diligently to my actor work will aid me in developing a new process. In addition to the theatrical practices, I am also examining psychological theories behind fear, anxiety, and the avoidance of chaos, and the ways in which such reactions can be negotiated.

The following research will explain the phenomenon behind irrational fear, and an outline for how I intend to combat this issue. My new process will rely heavily on having an in depth understanding of the context of the play, and the roles in which I am cast. I will examine Joan Littlewood’s mandate as a theatre practitioner and the significance of *Oh, What a Lovely War* as a piece of theatre. I will briefly explain World War I and the events and tensions that led to its outbreak. Many of the characters I play are soldiers so I will give a detailed description of the situation at the Front, as well as the literature that emerged from those who experienced its horrors. Finally, the reader can expect to find a detailed description of the acting techniques I will be exploring, and the characters I will be applying them to. This includes the incorporation of appropriate physical traits and dialects, and the application of specific actions that I will explore throughout rehearsal and into production.

The outcome I am moving towards is to reinstate a feeling of joy on stage. I hope to find ways in which to transfer the enthusiasm and freedom I feel in rehearsal to my performances. I am confident that studying the science behind fear, coupled with building a new acting process will  
| allow me to find the creative freedom and enjoyment I once had.



## Stage Fright and The Physiology of Fear

So, how does the mind work? I don't know. You don't know. Pinker doesn't know. And, I rather suspect, such is the current state of art, that if God were to tell us, he wouldn't understand.

Jerry Fodor, "Reply to Steven Pinker" (Fodor 33)

My acting challenge focuses largely on the idea of fear, and the making and breaking of rituals. I am an actor who struggles with finding joy on stage, because I suffer with stage fright. Webster's Dictionary defines suffer as:

1 a : to submit to or be forced to endure

b : to feel keenly : labor under

2 : undergo, experience

3 : to put up with especially as inevitable or unavoidable

I surmise that the sensations I experience while I am acting are the result of an immense pressure I put on myself to perform well. As this is the career I have chosen to pursue it is only proper that I should value the work I do, and, in turn, place have high expectations on myself. I am, however, developing a growing sense of complete discontentment with all the work I do as an actor, and the general outcome of the productions I am in. Part of my work will be in developing

a new standard of expectation. This will ultimately allow me to successfully accomplish my goals, and set me free of the role of critic that I have found myself playing.

The phenomenon “Stage Fright” is not limited to the performing arts. Its victims run the gamut from the smallest child to the presidents of great nations and institutions. It appears at the most inopportune and inappropriate times and in its most severe form can cripple and end a most talented and promising career or severely harm the most beautiful relationships. This phenomenon “Stage Fright” is not a singular event but is a theme which can pervade the fabric of one’s life. (Rappaport 1)

Basically, this fear can manifest itself not only in actors but musicians, athletes, and business executives: “Anyone who must communicate to others as part of one’s function” (Rappaport 1). Comedian Jerry Seinfeld jokes, “ According to most studies, people’s number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that sound right? This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you’re better off in the casket than doing the eulogy,” (qtd. in Brennick 42).

There are many symptoms connected to stage fright, and vary from person to person. The physical reactions generally consist of upset stomach (butterflies), speeding or slowing of cardiovascular activity, constriction of blood vessels, shakes and dizziness. In more extreme cases the person may experience tunnel vision, loss of hearing and vertigo (Ornstein). The psychological term for this type of reaction to fear is not called stage fright, but the Flight or

Fight response. The flight or fight response is a function of the autonomic nervous system (ANS), and is designed to kick in when you begin to sense danger: “The traditional view of the fear response is that it is good for individual or species survival because it allows individuals to confront or avoid threats” (Brown 171). The autonomic nervous system is comprised of two parts: the sympathetic nervous system and the parasympathetic nervous system (Ornstein). The arousal of the sympathetic nervous system is what causes us to feel the symptoms we associate with stage fright, and together those symptoms can be quite useful in a dangerous situation. The common symptoms felt when danger is sensed is an evolutionary technique that allowed our ancestors to successfully avoid potentially dangerous situations: the liver is stimulated by the release of stress hormones, and it pours extra sugar into your blood-stream; to burn this sugar you need more oxygen, hence the excitement in breath patterns; digestion slows so it will no longer necessitate its regular supply of blood sugar, this is to ensure larger muscle groups are given more blood sugar. More blood sugar in the larger muscle areas means propulsion forward is much easier. Take for example the writing of an exam. It is useful to be slightly nervous, so your senses are acute and you are alert.

An evolutionary perspective may assist our conceptual understanding of fear and when it is expressed. A revised definition of fear based on evolutionary considerations is: Fear is a modulator of risk (i.e. from aversion to seeking risk) that evolved to be responsive to reliability occurring cross-generational contexts. However, fear may also be identified as an Achilles’ heel of the brain that can easily be triggered. (Brown 172)

My actor challenge is to relearn how to act: to reinstate a state of safety on stage; to see the audience not as something to be feared, but something to be embraced; to believe myself as someone worthy of being watched; to find new acting techniques that give me a sense of preparedness instead of fear (to ask new questions, to finally answer old ones); to learn useful ways of combatting panic; to see myself as an actor, and truly want to be one.

### **Beginning a New Process**

In your choice lies your talent.

Stella Adler, *Stella Adler on Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov* (3)

In theatre there is much talk of ‘choices’. As a younger actor I thought I understood fully what was meant by the word. So was placed the foundation block upon which my ‘process’ was built. It was my goal to make interesting choices, while always fighting to be believable. I had an acting teacher when I was 19 who would shout at us, “I don’t believe you!” It became frightening to act in front of him. I would rather have died than not been believable. While I was doing my BFA at Sir Wilfred Grenfell College and for the three years that followed I spent copious amounts of time reading texts on acting styles, techniques and methods. Ultimately, my goal was to become a ‘perfect actor’. However, as my resume began to grow there came a point when I began to settle into a routine. I found an efficient way to be a believable actor. As time was such an important commodity it seemed necessary to work quickly, to ensure that at the very least the play would open on time. It is now my belief that part of my stage anxiety is due to a

general feeling of unpreparedness. This unpreparedness coupled with a sense that my own work does not meet my own standards sent me in a downward spiral. My fear of failure caused me to rely on what I knew would produce something at least watchable. However, knowing that there is so much more work I could be doing, I didn't trust that I was ever ready. A large portion of my thesis work, therefore, will be developing new processes, while allowing myself to live comfortably in a state of exploration for the duration of that creation.

I have become confused and disillusioned in my acting work. As a result, I am in search of a new performance methodology. Therefore, I am rereading acting texts with an open mind, in hopes of finding pieces that can influence the creation of my new process. I believe actors need to have the humility to know that their process may not always be appropriate, and may not meet the needs of all productions. It is necessary for me to assess what works for me now, as opposed to what has worked in the past. As an example, I have previously read David Mamet's text *True and False* and was unimpressed. The technique felt over-simplified and disrespectful to an actor's process. I felt it negated the important actor work that I considered necessary. However, I have recently revisited the text and developed a great appreciation for his approach. I am realizing that he is tired of seeing actors whose work does not translate to the audience, nor help the story. An actor should not look as though they are working. *True and False* is a controversial work and in it Mamet proposes that actors simplify their work to the basics: know what you want, and the ways in which you will try to achieve your goal (99). When I considered what was my current method, I had to deal with the fact that it did not always serve the play, nor aid in the telling of the story, nor benefit the ensemble. Much of my work was an attempt to become the character:

think their thoughts, experience their past, present and future. I do not wish to negate processes that are useful for other individuals, but simply clarify that this was not useful for me. I no longer wish to strive to ‘become’ my character. In developing my new process, I will only endeavor to fulfill tasks that are attainable; giving myself a list of rules that I can be sure to follow. I would like to create a framework based upon answerable questions. By removing the vagueness, I will build myself a platform upon which my work can rely on.

One text that has been extremely useful restructuring my actor work is *A Practical Handbook for the Actor* written by a group of students who wanted to articulate, clearly and concisely, the job of an actor and a method by which you will feel confident in your work on stage. They based their technique on classes they had taken with David Mamet and William H. Macy. “Technique is a knowledge of the tools that may be used for a certain craft and an understanding of how to apply these tools,” (Bruder et al. 8). The key words here are knowledge, tools, understanding, and apply. This philosophy, I believe, is ideal for anyone suffering with stage anxiety. It gives the actor a practical method by which to work. The comfort comes from walking on stage with a plan, and leaving the stage having executed this plan to some degree. The audience’s opinion is out of your control. The authors emphasize the importance of understanding what is within your control, and letting go of what you cannot, “...how can it possibly help to concern yourself with the views others choose to take of you, the overall success or failure of the play[...]?” (Bruder et al. 5). This piece of advice was immeasurably helpful for me. It has been my practice to want to please the audience, which is not something that I can predict. However, what is within my is my understanding of the text, the way in which the character contributes to the story, and how I use

my body and my voice to achieve the goals of the character. “Why not devote your time and energy to developing measurable skills such as your voice, your ability to analyze a script correctly, your ability to concentrate and your body?” (Bruder et al. 5).

A primary focus of mine in developing this new process has been learning to understand and control my body and voice. “Without the union of the psychological and the physical a role cannot be built,” (Moore 85). I was trained to place a great deal of importance on the psychological journey of my character, thinking that my ability to empathize would make me a great actor. I now know I will not be satisfied with my work until I feel I am using my instrument in a way that is aligned with the needs of each particular character. At this point in my research I am beginning to become aware of my patterns of anxiety, and am now working towards either using them in my favour, or ameliorating their effects so they do not become apparent while on stage. In the past I have worked to become comfortable with my own body as to appear natural on stage. While achieving this was a minor success, it is also necessary that actors learn not only to show how they would sit comfortably on a couch, but to take into consideration how their character might do the same. Tension in the body is necessary, however, the muscular tension that is created as a reaction to the audience will only interfere and impede my work. Much of *Freeing The Natural Voice* by Kristin Linklater deals with the relaxation of the body to allow the voice to sound as it should without unnecessary tension. This is another text I was not appreciative of upon first reading, but I see its merit. It is more than useful to actors. Many of the symptoms of stage fright are caused because of the tightening and holding of muscles. I must work towards bringing awareness to those parts of my body affected by tensions, and allowing

them to release, until the action of relaxation becomes subconscious. At the moment I am afraid of the feelings I get while allowing the release of tension. I am, however, comforted by the humorous, if not callous attitude shown towards people like me by Kristin Linklater, “The release of tension in some extremely nervous people, and the consequent submission of the lungs to the powerful involuntary nervous system, can be such a turnover in the whole state of being that dizziness is a way of life for a time,” (33). As a self-described nervous person it is difficult for me to explore new methods of acting, and new techniques to release tension. However, as the process I currently am working with is no longer comforting to me, it is essential that I do. I am realizing now the tension I carry while I eat supper, while I run, while I watch a movie. This work bleeds out of the studio and into life.

### **Relationship with the Audience**

A crowd of spectators oppresses and terrifies an actor, but it also rouses his truly creative energy.

Konstantin Staniskavski, *An Actor Prepares* (228)

Stage fright is a fascinating phenomenon. I was in my first play when I was 6, and I have not gone a year since without being in a play since. I played clarinet, sang, and did public recitations throughout my entire youth. At some point in my early twenties I began to see the audience not as a group who would cheer me on, but one waiting for me to fail. I imagined them having conversations after the show, competing over who could criticize me the most eloquently. This is termed in psychology as irrational paranoia (Ornstein). Though there are days I would argue that



it is completely rational, the truth is it is not. Audience generally does not come to the theatre hoping that you will make mistakes. Admittedly, my fear is probably enhanced by the fact that I have been one of those critical people. In fact, seeing theatre became a chore for me. I could no longer see a piece of theatre without needing to analyze it critically, removing all enjoyment for me. This transferred itself to my own work, where I would find myself on stage, having internal monologues as the director. In my imagination I would fix problems with the script, or write reviews of the play in my head. This is not the actor's job; the actor's job is to act. It *is* important to consider what the audience will take from the story because it is their lives we endeavor to enrich, however, thinking as they would think is not helpful. Another part of my working towards enjoyment on stage is to begin enjoying the theatre I attend. Actors and theatre practitioners must all have a critical eye, but must also have realistic expectations. Not every work of art will change your life, but this does not make it any less important.. Learning to enjoy theatre, both as a spectator and as a participant, has been integral to my enjoying my time on stage. I have set in place for myself a new set of instructions: after each class I write down two positive things I observed about my classmates and one positive thing I observed in myself. If I see a play I must write down two things I enjoyed or learned from the production. This initiative to highlight positive aspects in theatre has made observing them and appreciating them much easier. Consequently, I often notice numerous positives in my every day life.

In psychology there is a technique for overcoming irrational fears such as agoraphobia called flooding.

In the technique flooding the therapist literally floods the client's mind. He or she incessantly presents situations that evoke fear and anxiety. [...] Flooding is based on the principle that prolonged exposure to feared stimuli, while in a safe environment, will recondition the stimuli to evoke a neutral response. (Carstensen, Ornstein 98)

In a sense I have practiced flooding without knowing it. I have never abandoned acting; therefore I continued to subject myself to the stimuli that triggers my intense fear. One major element that is missing, however, is the 'safe environment' that the subject is meant to be engulfed in. I often feel as though I am not in a safe environment, and creating a sense of security in the rehearsal room will help me move forward. Because the audience tends to be the trigger for my fear, it is more difficult for me to use this form of therapy. There are ways in which I can experiment with flooding, and a way in which I am implementing this therapeutic process is to place more importance on the work I do in front of my classmates. It has been interesting to consider them as an audience. In a sense they are a microcosm of any audience. This procedure has triggered the symptoms of stage fright, but in an environment where I can continue my work. It has helped me develop coping mechanisms when the situation does arise. Because this test group are friends and colleagues, it is difficult to say whether or not the adjustments I've made will be applicable on stage. A positive result, nonetheless, is that I can consider the audience to be, at least, receptive, if not friendly. I hope, while moving into my thesis roles in *Oh, What A Lovely War!* I can keep that knowledge present in my work.

One of Britain's finest actors, Laurence Olivier experienced a great deal of stage fright that only became a problem quite late in his career. He developed a fear of the audience, and as a result began created an antagonistic relationship with them (Robbins).

Even Sir Laurence Olivier suffered it- not always, but for a short and painful period of time, quite a while after he had been acknowledged as possibly the greatest actor of his time. And then he could just barely get himself to go out onto the stage. He'd throw up. People would literally have to push him on stage. (Robbins 97)

He would refer to them as "the bastards", in attempt to feed off his antipathy to defeat his nervousness. Instead of trying to embrace them, he turned them into the enemy (Olivier 9). I have also attempted this. I worked to make the audience into a group of people I didn't care about, thus negating the importance of their opinions. This proved to be an unsuccessful method for me. I would ask myself, 'why am I even performing for these people, if I have nothing invested in their interests?' The other issue that arose was the effect such an attitude has on fellow performers. Most actors are appreciative of their audience, and it is not helpful for them to hear them belittled moments before going on stage, for the benefit of an actor who wishes to ignore them. "Fear is not a private affair because the person deeply infected by it will infect others, (Overstreet 114).

Thus, I begin working towards an actual engagement with the audience, instead of fearing them. I continue to make adjustments, and realize it may be as simple as picturing them in their underwear. Funnily enough, that is one technique I have not tried.

## **THE ONLY THING TO FEAR IS...**

What if we thought of fear as an amazing act of imagination?

Karen Thompson Walker (TED)

As I read psychological studies dealing with stage fright I found I was reading about fear repeatedly.

Fear is mostly regulated by the amygdala. The amygdala is a limbic system deep in the brain and it plays an important role in our association of emotions, namely fear. “If [patients] have suffered amygdala damage, they will consciously remember the conditioning but will show no emotional effect of it,” (Schacter 19). Fear is both inherent *and* learned. Experience can shape our fears.

The saying is true: that we often fear that we will experience fear. “If an unexpected panic breaks out, a certain susceptibility to panic must have been present. A shocked and confused morale lays the groundwork for panic” (Meerloo 32).

My anxiety has progressed to the point where when I am preparing to go on stage I become frightened that something will trigger my anxiety. It is not the idea of acting that scares me; what

scares me is that I may get scared! There are various psychological reasons for this. It is possible that it is stemmed from genealogy. It may be something I have learned, or that grew from another fear. For example, it is possible that I fear criticism, or disingenuous compliments. In my research it has become clear to me that the root of the issue is not as important as the exploration of solution. While it is comforting to know that there are various reasons we, as humans, do fear, not all of them negative, I may never be able to pinpoint the beginnings of the issues. I'd rather focus my energy on practical methods for overcoming the effects of my stage fright.

Karen Thompson Walker is a writer whose philosophy I first encountered on the *Ted Talks* website. She sees our fears as something that should be embraced and harnessed. Without some people struggling with their scary thoughts we would be far behind in our understanding of the universe (Thompson Walker). Thompson Walker speaks specifically of one man whose wild imagination kept him up at nights: Charles Darwin, the father of evolution. She says the key is to transfer fears into preparation and action (Walker). As an actor, preparation is monumental to feeling confident on stage. A strong sense of preparedness works as a grounding method when an actor begins to feel the symptoms of their Autonomic Nervous System reacting.

In Sonia Moore's book *The Stanislavski Method* she explains that part of an actor's work should include an entire inner monologue. "Between two sentences in a dialogue there is an inner monologue- a direct connection which is hidden. [...] Today's actor must be capable of thinking as the character would, seriously and deeply," (Moore 89). To aid in preparedness I have begun implementing the creation of an inner monologue as part of my process. It is helpful for me to

create a variety of things my character may be thinking in reaction to the action on stage. In the past I have plotted what the character would be feeling, which is less tangible, and harder to call upon. Whereas internal thoughts are much easier to act upon, and in creating ‘action’ emotion typically follows. I have always attempted to listen for what my character would hear, but once the show was in performance if I had not made specific choices I would panic. I want to be thinking the characters opinions, not thinking about what their opinion would be. I have found it helpful to give myself a large context for the inner monologue, so I don’t panic when the comments of another character make me feel different than the night before. The goal is to balance the work and the judgement in hopes of avoiding panic when the action changes.

“He that hath no stomach for this fight, let him depart.”

Henry, Henry V (Shakespeare, 468).

Writing this supporting document for my thesis is more than a scholarly endeavor. For me to continue as an actor, I must confront my fear and in doing so develop practical mechanisms for coping. I am determined to find a solution. Whether it is by acknowledging the psychosocial reasoning behind my fear, or by creating a series of coping methods that help me feel confident in my performance, I am confident that the challenge I have before me is surmountable.

## **The Roots of Fear And The Building Blocks For Change**

When I first began to study acting I was, as many young actors are, eager to utilize all the methodologies I had been exposed to during theatre school. This included exploring the time period in which the play took place, along with researching the context in which it was written. Examples of some questions I would ask myself are: Why did this playwright write his play when he/she wrote it? What was the social and political atmosphere of the time? Where does the major action take place? Can I find images that will help with my understanding of the aesthetic of the period? And so on, and so forth. In the past few years, however, those questions went unanswered and my time was spent answering questions that were centered around the emotions of the character. While I do not negate this as part of an actor's preparation, in researching a new process it is important that I rekindle my relationship with those original questions, linked as they are to a time when I had piece of mind while acting. These questions, and of course, many others, were questions I sought to answer in preparation for my thesis show, *Oh, What a Lovely War!* whose production history utilized many acting techniques, whose methodology fit my new performance process. Ultimately I hope the creation of a new methodology will inhibit the sense of fear and anticipation I have regarding performance. My research on fear has led me to understand that if the root of the anxiety is discovered and dealt with at an early stage there is a much greater chance of inhibiting the reaction. "When the panic reaction has once started, it is as if a chemical chain reaction were on the way to completion. [...] Nevertheless, panic reactions can be counteracted if one smothers them in the very beginning. We have to detect and diagnose those reactions early; then only are we able to effect a cure," (Meerlo 110).

## **Joan Littlewood, Her Theatre, and *Oh, What a Lovely War!***

*Oh, What a Lovely War!* is a play by Joan Littlewood that features songs made popular during World War I. Joan Littlewood was a creator of theatre, artistic director, writer, compiler and an ardent proponent of left-wing politics. It is apparent in Littlewood's body of work that she uses theatre as a means to make political statements: "Littlewood's politics were a driving force behind her theatrical endeavors and cultural activism and grew from her experience growing up and making theatre in the tumultuous years between the 1920s and the 1970s," (Holdsworth 5).

Joan Littlewood was born in London, England in 1914, the first year of the World War I. Littlewood turned five before the war was over and recalls some of the unrest in London, "I remember, too, the great silver fish which appeared in the sky one day. Everybody was out watching, 'til the bomb dropped. It destroyed the school in Lingham Street and killed nine people," (25). This memory, along with memories of soldiers in uniform visiting her mother, and singing war songs in her home certainly helped to define Littlewood as an activist (Littlewood 33). She went into theatre early in her life, attending the prestigious Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA). She was unhappy with the program and left after a short period of time, but not without some positive effects, "[...], this was action, a first taste of Rudolf Laban's work was to influence my whole life," (Littlewood 69). After leaving RADA she was able to secure semi-frequent radio work with the BBC. Through her work at the BBC she was introduced to Ewan MacColl, whose ideas about the medium of theatre should achieve suited her own. "Together



they devoted their energies to create a theatre which would be more dynamic, truthful and adventurous than anything the bourgeois theatre could produce,” (Harker 7). Their company, Theatre in Action, earned notoriety and praise for their contemporary, classical and new works. However, their political philosophies tended to land them in controversy and ultimately led to Littlewood and MacColl being banned from the BBC Broadcasting House. In 1945 the two, along with other theatre makers with similar political views, formed Theatre Workshop. The Theatre Workshop’s mandate was not markedly different than Theatre in Action: “‘We’ve had Action and Union,’ Someone hit the right note. I wrote it across my diary: ‘The Workshop’”(Littlewood 158). Its mandate was to was to perform new and classical plays that illuminated the plight of the working class: “Littlewood aimed to reanimate the social and political significance of English Renaissance and classics,” (Holdsworth 80). After touring shows around England and the Soviet Union the company settled at the now famous Theatre Royal in 1953. “Eight of us managed to squeeze into the old Alvis when we set out for Theatre Royal, Stratford-atte-Bowe, London, E15- a dump, as we already knew, but as you’ve gathered, we were incurable optimists,” (Littlewood 439). The members of the company moved in, literally, to the building. It became the home for Joan and her long time partner, Gerry. They lived and performed there for many years (Littlewood 475).

Gerry Raffles was the man Joan spent much of her life with. In fact, they were life partners until he died in 1975. For the purposes of my research, her relationship with Gerry is extremely important, as he was the one whose goal it was to write a play that was based on the songs of World War I. Gerry was artistic director of the theatre company E15. He wanted a play that “gave

us the soldier's point of view," (Littlewood 669). After three writers made unsatisfactory attempts, the last of which Joan sat in on the initial reading of, she suggested, "'Why not let the songs tell the story?' I said at last. 'You could preface them with news clips to put them in context. We could add period dances or cartoon sketches here and there. There's no point wasting time and money on this last effort. I could do better myself,'" (Littlewood 674). Thus, their play began to grow. Littlewood almost immediately was struck with an idea that the actors should be dressed as pierrots, or sad clowns. Pierrots are most typically recognizable as a sad clown who wears mostly white, and has a white face. His tragedy lies in that he loses the woman he loves to the more handsome Harlequin. Joan's reasoning for wanting the show to be filled with Pierrots says a lot about her opinions of the war. "The War is a pierrot show. It's the right period and after all, war is only for clowns!" (Littlewood 676). Part of my research is to find ways in which an actor can help manifest what the playwright intended. Actors working for Littlewood were expected to undergo a similar research process as I have mapped out for myself.

To achieve this artistic truth, actors had to explore the play as a whole, the world to which their version of the character would belong. They were expected to research the historical and social background of the action, its political implications, other works by or about the author, and so on. (Leach 123)

Understanding Joan Littlewood's thoughts on World War I, and the way in which she thought the play should be perceived has been influential to my own approach to the play.

Littlewood's autobiography was a great primary source for information about how the show was created, and subsequently what the playwright initially intended. By reading about her company's creative process I developed an understanding of the juxtaposition of the scenes, which amplified my concept of the flow of the piece. It was also immensely helpful to read how Littlewood spoke to the actors to get them to respond to the scenes in the way she desired. Some of her notes were, "Take it down now, time for truth," (Littlewood 680). She was responding to an actor whose instinct was to make the General he was playing incomprehensible. Thus I came to the conclusion that the war as a clown show speaks for itself, but actors must still display a range of emotional truth. "Imagine there's a trench running across the stage, you're in it [...]. A bombardment, which has been going on for two days, has just died down. Can you put yourself in that situation?" (Littlewood 677). During rehearsals she was clearly working with advanced concepts in performance, including sense memory and personalization. The pace of the play is quick, and its ultimate goal in carnation was not to overwhelm the audience with sentimental snapshots of the war. This is clearly illustrated in that she had her actors dressed as clowns. However, this tongue and cheek approach did not mean she would allow them to skip over their crucial work as actors. "She identified their problems and refused to allow them to ignore them" (Leach 122). While researching the show I learned that the original production prioritized acting over singing. Joan felt that the show, though it was a musical, should be primarily acted well, and then sung sufficiently (Littlewood 679). An issue arose in rehearsal when the BBC singers, who had been told by Joan they were singing 'wrong', threatened to leave the production. When faced with this problem Joan responded, "Let them. The actors can sing and any singers who stay will have to act," (Littlewood 679). This was an indicator to me of where

my major and minor focuses should lie as my acting work would take priority over my singing. However, there is also the fact that our production of *Oh, What A Lovely War!* is not the original production, nor do I think our director is striving for it to be. Much of this research was helpful for me for understanding context, but when the time comes, I may have to have the humility to throw it all away.

### **World War I and the “Reasons Why”**

Briefly summarizing the events that led to the outbreak of the war is no small task, but the most important thing to keep in mind is that many European countries had alliances, and agreements with each other for mutual protection. Ironically, it is these very agreements which helped precipitate and escalate the conflict. Russia and France had been allied for twenty years by 1914. This alliance was largely created out of fear, “[...] most obviously, fear of German expansion,” (Robbins 17). The alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary was over 30 years old. Russia had particular interest in Serbia because of Pan-Slav sentiment, and their desire for greater Slavic influence in The Balkans. With all of these entrenched alliances and political ambitions, it wouldn’t take much to pull all of these countries into a war. Gavrillo Princip was a member of the group The Blank Hand, who felt the Austro-Hungarian influence in Serbia was becoming too much. He took matters into his own hands and shot Franz Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria-Hungary while he was visiting Serbia, in June of 1914. “Princip [...] had little doubt that the assassination of Franz Ferdinand constituted ‘tyrannicide for the common good’” (Robbins 3). It was not a mistake and it was not without intention. Within days, Russia came to the defense

of Serbia and Germany showed its support for Austria-Hungary. If Russia was preparing to fight, France also had to mobilize, because of their long-standing agreement. All of this being said, early on most country leaders did not want to alarm their capitals, and so for a period they tried to carry on as normal. “Kaiser Wilhelm went ahead with his plans for his annual cruise off the coast of Norway. He predicted that there would be a period of tension for about three weeks, and then all would be well,” (Robbins 5). However, by early August 1914, Germany was invading Belgium, whose neutrality had been promised them by Britain. “The treaty obligation at work was the Treaty of London 1839, guaranteeing Belgium neutrality,” (Robson 9). This, along with their desire to protect France, ultimately brought England and her dominions into the war. Within two months all the countries had mobilized and fighting had begun.

### **The Situation at the Front**

Because I play many male characters in this production, much of the research I conducted focused on the situation endured by soldiers at the Front. I wanted to ensure I understood, not only the political tensions that lead to the outbreak of war, but the truth of the life of a soldier at the front. Part of what I focused my research on was the culture of the homefront. I have read both historical accounts and analytical studies, but even more so, literature from that time. Because the central focus of this play, and the seed from which it grew, are the songs from that time, I felt it was necessary to understand the cultural prerogatives during the war. What about the sentiment of the time made certain literature, music and art popular? I searched for works that included, first hand, the point of view of those who were directly affected by the war. One

primary resource that proved to be extremely helpful in stimulating my sense of what the situation was like for soldiers and nurses at the Front was letters that had been sent home.

Dear Lois, I had a very close call with gas which they use a lot. We got within about a hundred yards of the post. If it hadn't been for the fellow with me, I probably wouldn't be writing this letter because I couldn't see. My eyes were running water and burning, so was my nose and I could hardly breathe. I gasped, choked, and felt the extreme terror of the man who goes under in the water and will clutch at a straw. (Holt qtd. in *Letters From Home*).

From here I went to poetry written between 1914 and 1918. Though I understand that a poem is not a source to rely on for fact, it is a source that illuminates the emotional range of the time and the imagery is richly descriptive, ideal for an actor's preparatory work. Because I will be embodying layers of meaning in this play, cold hard facts do not serve my process as much as understanding personal experience. In addition, one of my characters writes articles at the Front, trying to get them published in local papers. This led me to a search for understanding what the mindset of other writers was at the time. One of the most useful texts I found was *The Great War and Modern Memory* by Paul Fussell. This book juxtaposes historical fact with pieces of literature that illustrate personal experience. He says about the book:

I have focused on places and situations where literary tradition and

real life notably transect, and in doing so I have tried to understand something of the simultaneous and reciprocal process by which life feeds materials to literature while literature returns the favor by conferring forms upon life. (Fussell xv)

In addition to studying the literature of the period, I also sought images from the Front to help with my submersing myself in the world of the war. Pictures of the trenches, before and after pictures of the battlefields, and pictures of the weaponry proved to be extremely useful for me. Images of prisoners of war, muddy trenches and artillery helped me build a visual foundation for the lives of my characters (Duncan). When I began this portion of my research I anticipated the images would depict a primarily dismal and bleak atmosphere. This was not the case, and that knowledge made the foundation of my characters much more diverse. “Canadians at the front taking advantage of a period of rest to do a little mending on their shirts” (Duncan 59). The photograph described in the previous sentence shows three smiling men who are sitting beneath a 6 foot tall mound of mud. Another image that juxtaposes the brutality of the war with the positive attitudes of the soldiers shows troops manning their cannons and pistols, stationed outside an office in Petrograd. “Provisional government troops guarding the central telephone station in Petrograd” (Duncan 185). Whether the smiles are a result of naivety, feigned positive attitude, or simply a reaction to the awareness of a camera, it helped me add depth to my characters.

## Context Through Culture: Poetry and Song 1914-1918

Moving forward, I will narrow in on the specific to the experiences of the soldiers and civilians whose lives changed drastically during the war. The majority of my research focused upon the British experience; however, I also studied the changes in German culture that were as a result of the war. I play a German businessman whose small scene exemplifies the lack of truth available for the common person, and the unreliability of the news. In Germany, on average, 100 poems were published in the news papers daily (Prochasson 323). While that seems to indicate that Germany was made up for ‘poets and thinkers’, many of the poems were simply used as propaganda, and perpetuated the hatred of the British by the Germans. “The language [of the poems] seemed made for militaristic effusions,” (Felavich 32). Possibly the most popular of all German wartime poems was Ernst Lissauer’s “Habgesang gegen England” or (in English) “English Song of Hate Against England”. Lissauer was a poet who had seen little success before the war, but he articulated the animosity felt by the greater part of the German society for England.

French and Russian, they matter not,  
A blow for a blow, a shot for a shot,  
We fight the battle with bronze and steel,  
And the time that is coming Peace will seal.  
You we will hate with a lasting hate,  
We will never forego our hate,  
Hate by water and hate by land,



Hate of the head and hate of the hand,  
Hate of the hammer and hate of the crown,  
Hate of the seventy millions choking down.

(Lissaeur 208)

The repetition of the word ‘hate’ very clearly highlights the propaganda of the time. Turning opponents into a group who deserve to be hated helps the country stay motivated and united. Of course this type of call to arms was not only prevalent in Germany; it could be seen scattered throughout all countries involved in the war.

Interestingly, and conversely, in England it appears that the majority of very popular poetry and songs fell to other side of the spectrum, with themes that were more centered around love, homesickness, and the security of a peaceful life. “The production of sales and songs expressed the world of sociability imbedded in pre-war music halls and theatres, a world of safety and affection that soldiers had joined up to defend,” (Winter 334). Songs such as “It’s a Long Way to Tipperary”, which was extremely popular during the war, exemplify those themes stated in the previous quote:

It’s a long way to Tipperary,  
It’s a long way to go.  
It’s a long way to Tipperary,  
To the sweetest girl I know.  
Goodbye Picadilly, farewell Leicester Square!

It's a long, long way to Tipperary,  
But, my heart's right there!

(Judge, Williams 169)

These songs not only helped to keep up the spirits of the people at home, but the spirits of those at the Front. Many of the songs from *Oh, What a Lovely War!* have a similar feeling: a feeling of promise of a better life. This is certainly still using the medium for propaganda, but in a slightly different way. As opposed to creating hate, the memory of a perfect life before the war gave one something to fight for. As for the women, many of the songs from the female perspective painted a picture of a stoic woman who sends her lover to war, and will wait patiently for him, knowing he is doing the morally correct thing.

Say a prayer for the boys out there,  
For our heros o'er the sea  
In that raging fray, by night and day,  
They're fighting for you and me  
When they take their stand in No Man's Land  
We know they'll do their share  
So that we may live, their lives they give  
Say a prayer for the boys out there.

(Grossman)

“Say a Prayer for the Boys Out There” was an extremely popular wartime song, designed to illustrate that the females must make sacrifices for their country as well. That meant stoically sacrificing their men. However, as the war went on much longer than anticipated, many women had to join the war efforts in increasing ways. Most clearly, songs like this highlight the intended sentiment of the time, not necessarily the feelings felt by the masses. That being said, it is undeniable that music was the comfort of the time for many British people. “Record sales in Britain boomed. From a pre-war level of about 4 million records, the Gramophone Company boasted about 6 million sales in 1918-1919,” (Martland 205). A similar pattern occurred in France, as well. Because so many were in mourning, having lost family members, the trend was to find a diversion. With the growing popularity of the gramophone, that diversion could be located within your own home. “Under the pressure of the war people appear to have reacted introspectively,[...] and sought entertainment from gramophone records rather than pubs and other public places of entertainment,” (Martland 211). All of this was helpful for me, in understanding the general feeling of the time: escapism, relaxation, and intense national patriotism were prevalent in the lives of most of England’s citizens. This does not, however, prove to be entirely true for the rest of the United Kingdom.

I came across another poem that informed me of a sentiment that I would not otherwise have been privy to: tension between the England and her Dominions. Much of my research centered upon English lifestyles, battles and culture during the war. In addition to this, I am a Newfoundlander, and Newfoundland was still part of England during World War I. I had previously thought myself someone who had quite a bit of knowledge of Britain’s experience

during the war. However, I had not been enlightened to the feelings of injustice felt by many in the British Commonwealth. William Butler Yeats' poem "An Irish Airman Foresees his Death," written as a eulogy to Major Robert Gregory reflects upon an Irishman's purpose in the British forces, and highlights the complex relationship that many Irishmen felt towards World War I;

I know that I shall meet my fate

Somewhere among the clouds above;

Those that I fight I do not hate

Those that I guard I do not love

A small excerpt from the poem illustrates the confusion Irishmen felt by fighting a war that did not entirely feel to be theirs. However, there is also evidence that illustrates the dedication and commitment Ireland had to fighting the war. The Home Rule Act was in the process of being passed, right as the war began. This act, when passed, would give Ireland sovereignty (Robson 71). Due to the war the bill was postponed, and though the Irish Nationalists were generally disappointed, this did not stop them from volunteering to fight for Britain. "Over a million men enlisted by the end of 1914, and 2.2 million by September 1915", (Robson 41). In spite of this, in 1916 the Irish Republicans mounted the Easter Uprising designed to end British Rule in Ireland. The British did not take well to this, and it created tensions that carried across the ocean to Irish-American immigrants, further complicating matters when the United States joined the war. "The British treatment of Ireland since the Easter Rebellion in Dublin in 1916 had incensed Irish-

Americans,” (Robson 70). Needless to say, there was not just tension between countries, but along supposedly ‘united’ fronts, as well.

### **Building a New Process: Replacing Fear With...**

Context is certainly useful but as Mamet says, “[But] it ain’t going to help. It will not help you in the boxing ring to know the history of boxing, and it will not help you onstage to know the history of Denmark,” (67). Because much of my actor research upon techniques, I will use this play as a foundation upon which to build my new methodology. The advantages of this are numerous. Most notably, I believe school to be a safe environment in which I may try something new. In terms of overcoming any fear, a safe environment or ‘permissive atmosphere’ is imperative: “A permissive atmosphere, in the therapeutic sense, is one in which the individual is sufficiently freed from threat that he can relax his customary self-defensive tensions and ‘let himself go’”(Overstreet 184). Secondly, because my colleagues are also working on artistic challenges of their own, I anticipate a level of fearlessness in rehearsal and in performance will be prevalent. My goal is to allow this fearlessness to counter balance any of my own anxieties regarding the outcome of the show. If this sense of fearlessness is not present, as I anticipate it will be, I will endeavor to create it myself.

Building upon my research into the work of a number of theatre practitioners, including Mamet, Spolin, Moore and Meisner, it is imperative to apply their philosophies to my rehearsal process

as part of an entirely new methodology. I have broken the 11 characters I am playing into groups based on which practices I believe will most serve me in building the character.

### **Physical Body Transformation**

The first character I play is a German businessman. He is on stage for less than a page, but his purpose is great in that he exemplifies the purpose of knowledge, and the fickle nature of ‘fact’ during times of unrest. I also play an British woman named Myfanwy. She is an upper class gossip who is only interested in the ‘new’ news. Thirdly, I play a British Corporal. He is bossy but well-respected. These three characters are of higher status, which is new for me. I often play lower status characters and have become quite comfortable in this niche. The challenge for me here lies in that I am quite small in stature, and therefore consider myself to be less powerful. Lately, however, I have been observing traits in small people who demand respect. For example, my mother is an extremely powerful, intimidating and no-nonsense lady. She is shorter than me, but I rarely feel that way. A professor at the Harvard Business School, Amy Cuddy, studies the uses of body language in power positions. She cites a test done on ‘high-power’ and ‘lower-power’ body poses, wherein the results say after striking a high-power pose for two minutes, testosterone levels increase, on average, 20%. “Our nonverbals govern how people think and feel about us” (Cuddy). Part of my actor work for my higher status characters will be to use physicality to tell the story of who my character is. To a seasoned actor this may seem like the obvious choice, but admittedly, I have not had much experience with physical transformation on stage. It has not been asked of me in this past. This play requires me to transform eleven times

into eleven different characters, and I want these transformations to be as seamless and as believable as possible. The research I have done on body posturing, and the messages it can send, has also been helpful for me in terms of dealing with my stage fright. Because power-positions literally alter how one feels about oneself, I anticipate using them will have a positive impact on my confidence during the show.

### **Finding (a) Voice(s)**

Of course, physical transformation will not be sufficient on its own. All of my characters speak in dialects that are different from mine. With work in dialect class, coupled with private coaching sessions, my dialects have improved. However, I play a Scottish *ghillie*, a young boy who is carrying the hunting gear for his superiors. Luckily for me, this character sits within my comfort area in that he is of lower status. A requirement less than second nature will be the proper execution of a Scottish dialect, in addition to Irish and English dialects. Those are challenging but not so much so as Scottish. A resource that has been extremely beneficial for me in this area is the IDEA website. (IDEA). IDEA stands for International Dialects of English Archive, and it has a bank of Scottish dialects, with voice samples from men and women ranging from age 20 to 50. As I study the Scottish dialect I began listening to women speak it, trying to find my own version. As I become more confident I will listen to the male samples, in search of nuances that differ between the genders. “If you are playing a part requiring you to speak with a German accent, you analyze the script for action and you learn the accent separately,” (Bruder et al 49). This will allow me to feel competent with the dialect and not just in relationship to my text,

freeing my acting work from inhibition from dialect issues. Again, this research is very helpful to me, considering my specific actor challenge as a sense of preparedness will be a key factor in my finding enjoyment on stage. The physical body and voice work will hopefully allow me something tangible to focus, realizing that emotional work can be unrepeatable and evasive.

Creating physical characters requires a strong and healthy body. An actor's body and voice is their primary tool. While musicians have their instruments, actors have their bodies. It is, therefore, essential for their instrument to be fine-tuned, so it can be useful to them when they need it. One of my characters in *Oh, What A Lovely War!* is a 'runner', having been informed by the director that I will be 'running like a maniac' during the show. Another portion of my preparation for this show has been to jog a minimum three times a week, and circuit train to build up my strength. This adjustment has been beneficial to me in all ways, as exercise tends to be. There has been a positive correlation in my attitude and confidence that I think will have a very positive effect on my experience with this show.

### **Creating Achievable Goals: Solidifying Actor Work**

In the past much of my work as an actor has been to rely upon the emotional life of the character. Because I no longer can trust that approach, I have sought out acting methods that focus away from emotion toward action. One of the female characters in *Oh, What a Lovely War!* is in a situation where she and some other ladies are looking at a casualty list. My previous practice would be to imagine the sense of panic I'd feel, in anticipation of seeing a loved one's name on



the list. Secondly I would aim to recall grief as my character discovers her loss. I no longer believe I am an actor who can trust that work, because it is not always repeatable for me. It may be a myth but David Mamet often says his favourite quote about acting was said by James Cagney, “You walk in, plant yourself squarely on both feet, look the other fella in the eye, and tell the truth” (Mamet). In my attempt to specify my acting work, this quote has become a touchstone for me. I cannot negate how much is actually packed into this statement. To tell the truth in performance requires a lot of work, and an understanding of what the story requires of the character. “An actor’s primary focus should be on what the character is doing- not on what she is feeling. It is a character’s actions that an audience can see and understand”(Miller 15). Because my new focus is to embrace the audience, it is my goal to make sure they understand the story. This young woman, looking through the casualty list, has a job in the script. *A Practical Handbook for the Actor* breaks down actor work in the following way: Ask yourself: 1) What is your character literally doing? In my case my character is literally reading a casualty list. 2) What is the essential action of the character? For me it is something along the lines of looking to friends for comfort. (This is subject to change depending on the way the director would like the scene to go). And finally 3) What is this action like to me? (Bruder et al 27). This is the portion of the work that focuses on the truth of the moment. Because I have experience looking to friends for comfort, it isn’t too difficult for me to recall that and make it truthful. These three things seem simple, but I believe they efficiently and eloquently cut to the core of what acting is.

Part of my thesis challenge is to have the humility to try new processes, even though I may not have previously have been intrigued by them. Some of Sanford Meisner’s exercises have eluded

me in the past, but his focus on movement from internal emotional life to external action, aligns with my own goals, so was certainly worth investigation. The most notable exercise, in this regard, is Repetition. This exercise involves repeating the same line multiple times to a scene partner, but not predetermining what the emotional attitude should be. The goal of the exercise is to find freedom and spontaneity (Meisner 103). This exercise requires a scene partner, so I have recruited a friend of mine to help me. I applied this exercise to some of my text in the play. The results have been positive, in that I have learned some of those lines so well that I have no anticipation regarding them. David Mamet says in his book *True and False* that there is a lot of value in knowing your lines extremely well, “as if they were gibberish,” (62). The intended benefit is that then actors will be free to accomplish their action and not worry about the lines of the script. Listening to Meisner speak about acting was extremely helpful and exciting. Inarguably, he has a profound understanding of his own technique. His belief was that actors should stop working intellectually and work towards moments of spontaneity and truth (Meisner 36). Because I have a fear of this, it may prove useful for me. I am finding the practical application of searching for spontaneity difficult. I have decided that for my character, Fourth Soldier, I will work on spontaneity. My tendency had been to overwork, which means I would indulge in writing pages upon pages of notes about my character before the rehearsal process began. The result of which was my spending large portions of the rehearsal attempting to fit the character I had already built into a play that was under construction. It is very common for me to show up to rehearsal completely off-book, and feeling as though I had the majority of my work done. This work I tend to refer to as ‘heady’, referring to using my head. Fear researchers believe that a practical application for dealing with fear is to move impulses from the head down into the

body: “One of the first aids in relaxation and to getting to know the body is being able to move your awareness out of your head and into the various parts of your body” (Rappaport 33).

Keeping this in mind, I will attempt to break this habit, and allow myself the freedom to build the character in conjunction with the play, while paying closer attention to physical impulses. The Forth Soldier’s scene is a beautiful one that illustrates the historical Christmas Eve in the first year of World War I when a group of German soldiers and a group of British soldiers met in the middle of no man’s land to shake hands. I have selected this scene to exercise spontaneity because I think it is appropriate, given the circumstances of the action. The fear these men would have felt, the anticipation, the excitement, the guilt, and whatever else may arise, would have completely took them off guard. I have read the scene a few times, but I have not prepared any background actions for my character. I am going to see what comes up in rehearsal, and hopefully I will find some truthful moments, that can then become repeatable. Part of my work will be to keep very specific journal entries when we begin rehearsing that scene, to ensure I can recall the experience. I will endeavor to take the work from my head and drop it into my body and core. Sanford Meisner said, “You are judging the material from your heads, not your hearts,” (160).

Reflecting on everything I’ve studied so far, I ultimately want to keep in mind that I am always going to be myself. There are things an actor can reasonably expect of themselves, and I believe I have built for myself a strong base line to begin creating a process that supports with this philosophy. Fear is generally created by an impending sense of the unknown. “Often adequate knowledge or lack of such knowledge is what makes all the difference between our feeling able

or not able to cope with a situation” (Overstreet 201). By translating all of my research and preparation into the creation of a new process I will have a strong knowledge base and will no longer be striving for intangible and elusive goals. I tell the students I teach at York to always give themselves one compliment after each class. I also tell them to articulate one thing they perceive they need to work on but worded in a way that it is achievable and workable. It occurred to me recently that, though I teach that, I don’t practice it often enough. During the rehearsal process for *Oh, What a Lovely War!* and throughout the run I will put myself to task and follow my own rules.

## **Conclusion**

When I began this process of building a new acting process which might allay my previous associations with acting that were saturated with fear, I cannot say I was optimistic. I was interested in studying theatre and fear from a new perspective, while trying to maintain realistic goals for myself. In my experience, stage fright is not something one simply overcomes. In the past I have attempted to overcome my fear on my own through various methods such as journaling, and focusing on reality. It goes without saying that I did not overcome the issue previously, as there would have been no need to spend the last year dedicated to such extensive research on the subject.

Now that *Oh, What A Lovely War!* has come to an end I am happy to report that I am pleased with the outcome my work and research generated. Throughout the run of the show I did not

experience panic that I could not address by means of the groundwork I laid for myself in rehearsal and research. To say that there were no moments when I felt the seed of panic beginning to grow would be false. I have reconciled that this may never be a reality for me. I may always have fears and doubts that sprout mid-performance. They might be caused by a feeling of being overwhelmed, underprepared, or predicting that chaos may be around the corner. However, the techniques I have put in place for myself, when called upon, gave me something to focus upon and, therefore, I did not fall into the traps my fear had created for me in the past. When I began to feel slightly disorientated or overcome I reminded myself of whatever action I had given myself for that beat, or section of the scene. For example: ‘What am I doing here? Oh yes, I wanted to *write my paper*. Go back to that.’ Once I refocused myself on my task, without consciously realizing it, the fear did not become unbearable. Sometime the action I gave myself was something literal, like *write my paper*. Sometimes it was something I wanted to do to someone else. For example. *rally the troops*: excite, entice, revive, bolster. If I began to judge the scene or wonder what I was actually doing on stage, I would remind myself of whatever verbs I had assigned this scene. This began my primary objective, giving me little space in my brain to worry.

Another portion of my research that helped me to enjoy the entire run of the play was to heighten my awareness of my body, both internally and in space. If I felt worry begin to grow I would focus on my breath and/or the physical position I was in. I would bring awareness to what I was touching, and what was touching me, what my clothes felt like, and any other signals my body was sending me. I also allowed myself a brief moment to re-focus upon my breath. I believe the

panic may be linked to my holding my breath, or giving myself too many emotional tasks that I no longer remember to breathe. I would remind myself to breathe, and feel my feet on the floor. The result was a calming effect, having allowed myself a moment to regroup, without self judgement.

There were times in the show when I felt confused about my exact task on stage. This is partially due to that often we were bodies on stage, meant to create a picture. This type of scenario does not require the actor work I had put in place for myself. Because I could not apply my typical actor questions to these moments, I was at a loss as to what were the questions I should be asking. In rehearsal I simply performed what I was told by the director, thinking that this was the easy part of the show. However, when we entered the run I realized that I did wonder things about what I was doing out there. Questions came up for me such as: Am I my factory worker here? Am I a soldier? If this is a group scene, are we all meant to have the same opinion? Are we meant to look at the person who is speaking to us or gaze straight ahead? During the run I answered these questions for myself, but in the future I will know to ask them during rehearsal. Part of the reason I did not ask these questions during rehearsal was because I felt we were pressed for time, and I did not want to irritate the director. I also refrained from asking questions because I questioned my vocabulary, and my ability to correctly articulate what it was that was not feeling right for me. I think a way to combat this in the future is to make sure I am thorough in asking questions in rehearsal. If it feels inappropriate at the time, I will work towards answering my own questions. This show helped me have a new understanding of when to ask

questions and when it is appropriate to just make a choice myself and see what feedback comes from it.

A portion of the rehearsal plan I had developed for myself turned out not to be applicable once we were in the rehearsal room. The reasons for this outcome vary but most typically the character in question was either cut from the show, or the concept for the scene did not comply with my initial instincts. When I mapped out my rehearsal plan for the character The German Business man, I had intended to work on physical body transformation as a means of believably creating a higher status character. I also felt that this small scene was one that the director would consider to be in the bouffant style, as it was mentioned we would play with that in rehearsal.

However, as rehearsal progressed the director decided that the story needed to focus more on the person/group of people who made the men go to war, and who was really in charge. This resulted in us directing the majority of our lines toward the MC character, checking in with her to see if what we were saying was okay and if we were allowed to continue. Thus, she became the higher status character in the scene and we were not meant to fight her for that status. In another instance I planned to use power positions to embody, The General, but he was cut from the play very early in the rehearsal process. These two changes caused me to have to rethink entirely what I had planned, which I believe was good for my specific actor challenge. I had to make choices quickly, go back and look at the script from a new angle, and not allow worry that my preparation had been an unnecessarily stressful or wasted endeavor.

However, the changes that came about in rehearsal were not always the potential cause of stress. A portion of my research that was far more useful than I could have even imagined was the research I did on the Irish Fusilliers and the Irish Rebellion of 1916. While in the original script the only mention of the rebellion was a panel that said “Easter, 1916: Rebellion in Ireland”, our director decided to extrapolate on that event further. In my previous research, to help me understand the mindset of the Irish soldiers I read poetry written by them. This resulted in the director having me recite a Yeats poem called “Easter: 1916” as an Irishman rebelling against England. I wanted to be sure to include this as part of my conclusion simply for the positive effect it had on me in rehearsal. Because I am pursuing joy in theatre, I think this event is relevant as it was one of the most joyful parts of the show for me. Not only did the research I conducted on the literature of the time come in handy, so did my experience as a Newfoundlander. For many, many years Newfoundland was working towards independence from England, and trying to stand on her own two feet. We eventually gained it and then shortly after were sold to Canada. Many Newfoundlanders have pride and rebellion in their blood, so I felt that drawing on my own experience was extremely useful in this situation. What I discovered was that in the past when I have attempted to draw on my own experience, I have done it on a micro level; my own individual experience. From this I learned that if I expand my experience and consider it more of a global or universal feeling, it is much easier for me to call upon the associated emotions.

There were many great days and many hard days while rehearsing this play. There were moments when there was so much tension that the unhappiness was palpable. I feel this is worth



mentioning because of my particular challenge. In regards to the rehearsal process, I am not convinced that my previous actor-self could have withstood it. Because I had given myself a very specific goal, and ways in which to work towards achieving it, I am proud. “Ease and joy” became like a mantra for me, both during rehearsal but also throughout the run. Once audience came in and I began to feel myself getting tense, or mistrustful of them, I would just say those words to myself. They took on a new meaning, and created a deeply caring feeling inside me that matched their tone. I took time to look at the audience when I was in the wings. I watched them smiling, laughing, and listening. I saw kind-looking people whose lives were enriched, on some level, due to the story we told them. I looked at the audience, who weren’t at that moment looking at me, and I let myself trust them. For me, that was my greatest accomplishment.

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## Appendix A: Selected Journal Entries

### November 11th: First Table Read

We just finished our first table read for *Oh, What A Lovely War*. Lots of thoughts and feelings. So, let's be honest, because there is no use in behaving otherwise: that was crazy. I hardly know what else to say! (Except a million other things).

Why was it crazy? There is a lot going on and a lot of people in the room and a lot of accents and a lot of opinions and a lot of personalities. All of this is great. It's hilarious and energetic. However, before I sat to write this, I was thinking to myself; Wow. I am stressed about the x amount of hours this group will spend together, and I am worried about all of the millions of details that need to be worked out. ISSUE #1: so, here it is! I am both shocked and completely not surprised by how this feeling of anxiety arose in me after the first read through. I am shocked by how predictable I have become, and am unsurprised by my feelings. I just didn't think it would happen so soon, but now I am reflecting, and it probably has routinely arisen (my anxiety, I mean) at this stage. I probably have not diagnosed it so easily because the negative effects (or, at least perceived negative effects) at this stage are minimal, in relation to what comes.

I am both ashamed and pleased that the chaos overwhelmed me tonight. I am ashamed because I wish it weren't the case, and of course it does not serve me to feel so overwhelmed so easily. However, I am pleased because it is a great place to begin unpacking these associations, and compartmentalizing them into manageable and conquerable chunks.

FIRST: Why am I overwhelmed? Articulate.

- 1) There are lots of people in the room. It is a lot for me to take in. I want to be friends with all of them, and I want them all to have a good time during this process. Maybe I want to be the one that ensures they do.
- 2) I am overwhelmed by my need to 'do a good job'.
- 3) I am overwhelmed at the thought of what I cannot predict. There are lots of things going to go wrong during this rehearsal process, and lots of problems that will have to be solved. I worry in advance about what they will be.

SECOND: What can I do about these factors contributing to my overwhelmth? Explain.

- 1) I can make friends but have a very clear goal for each rehearsal. This way I can ensure I am focused on *my task*, my job- which is giving all that I can to this show. Balancing personalities can be difficult. I worry there will be tension in the group. However, this is part of LIFE. Not everyone gets along. I have to expect this type of thing. I get a bad stomach when people get mad, but their anger is theirs. I am going to practice not interfering.
- 2) "Doing a good job" was actually not a huge factor for me tonight. I applaud myself for that. I had fun with parts, and my accents. I learned stuff about my characters because I let the script

speak to me, instead of my usual practice which is to try to make the script what I already think it is. So, tonight I found freedom and play. My hope is to maintain a sense of that during table work and then once we are on our feet.

- 3) I have a fear of chaos. It is why I do not like crowded places or mess. There isn't anything wrong with me! I say this because, until recently, I did not believe this. I thought there was something wrong with me! Articulating that ideally I would spend my time in a quiet, open space with lots of fresh air has helped me be okay with that I may find myself uncomfortable at times when that is not available. However, I am not in danger just because I am not where I feel the happiest.

To conclude: If something needs to be sorted out during rehearsal, there is not need for me to panic. We just need to take time to figure it out! My fear kicks in when I feel I am under prepared for the demands. The fact of the matter is I have an excellent history of problem solving on stage (bragging moment). I need to remind myself of this, and hopefully embrace chaos as exciting, liberating and exhilarating!

### **November 18th: Company Meeting**

We just did the company meeting for everyone involved in the show, which was a surprising BILLION people (or so it felt) to me.

So... tonight was interesting in terms of my 'process'. I wanted to wait until I felt more.. positive? to write this but I guess the negative is what I should be dealing with, because it is the truth.

Everything started off great. When we had to go up on stage and read the first act I was really taking advantage of listening to the cast, and trying to hear new things. I wanted, going into this evening, to make discoveries about the text, my characters, and find reasons to get excited about this show. I applaud myself for my listening because that was really going well. I tried to listen to the cast and not read along, so I could hear truthfully and not be distracted by what I put on the text. This was going well. I was really having fun. Then out of nowhere I got super dizzy, disoriented, and confused. My heart began racing and I could feel it in my pumping in my brain. I got tunnel vision and my hearing went wonky. I was immediately so pissed off. I was pissed because I had no sense of what was coming, no warning signs whatsoever. I was nervous before we got up on stage but I was feeling comfortable once we began, because I switched my focus to the work I wanted to accomplish.

So, how did I deal with this reaction, which felt to come out of nowhere? From what I can remember I put myself in a small position during the initial panic, so I tried to combat this feeling by changing my physical posture dramatically. I made myself take up more space in my chair (ie. not hide from the audience). I put my feet, which had previously I had been sitting on in my chair, flat on the floor. I then tried to focus on my breath (because it occurred to me I may have been holding my breath in attempt to 'act harder'). I glanced to my left at Bob and described silently to myself all the details of what he was wearing, and all the while worked to not miss any of my lines- which I did successfully. I acted with Neil quite closely (he was on my

right). I touched him a bit, which was not really appropriate for the scene but it helped to ground me. It made me feel better.

#### POSITIVES:

- I calmed much quicker than usual
- I allowed myself to get mad AFTER I left stage and not DURING the read. This way I did not allow the fear to effect my performance, but I didn't deny that I was genuinely annoyed by the appearance of it.
- I remember the moment it happened, which is helpful in understanding or diagnosing triggers.

The last note is useful. Particularly, the scene we were reading when the fear kicked in is loud and chaotic. I recognize I have a sensitivity to volume and lighting changes. So, I know I am not to DIE out there! I am just a big of a wiener.

So, I came home. Cried. Called my boyfriend who made me laugh a whole bunch, and decided to write about it. I didn't tell any of my colleagues. I don't want to worry them. More importantly, I was ashamed and embarrassed. I am trying to reconcile with those feelings now.

#### **November 25th: Rehearsed Hunting Scene**

Rehearsed the Scottish Ghille scene (or so we seem to be calling it) tonight. All plans I had are gone out the window! Ha! They don't work with Autumn's vision, which I am fine with. I expected that would happen. What is NOT okay with right now is how disrespected the actors are feeling. I am feeling anxiety about how exhausting this show is going to be, and how that doesn't seem to be a concern for our director. I think my anxiety is ramping because I don't think I would like this show if I was an audience member. This is an issue for me, as I have discussed previous. I tend to be a critic of both my performance and of the show, which does not allow me to get my job done. I am trying to reconcile with it, but right now it feels like the only way for me to combat my feelings of mistrust are to develop some sense of indifference towards the show which of COURSE I don't want to do! So, I read a few studies that say the way happy things make neurons fire to send us the message to smile, it can work in the opposite direction! Ie. Smiling can cause neurons to fire that will make you feel happy. So, if you come to rehearsal right now you will notice I have a smile on my face ALL THE TIME. This may be scaring people, I don't know. If it is, I apologize to them but I must be selfish now. I have also decided to not interfere with conversations that really don't involve me. A lot of things get brought up in the room and the actors hear things that are really not our concern, but because we overheard them, we tend to make them our business. Not me. Not anymore. If it isn't a direct note for me, I don't hear it. It just gives me more things to think about and problems to solve and makes me feel completely overwhelmed. Of course, this method isn't ideal. Who's kidding who? I just can't think of anything else right now. I can't seem to make myself like this play at the moment, so I have had to make sure I am being professional and doing my job. I think this is okay! You won't always love every play you are in! I can't agree with every choice a director makes, but that doesn't mean I won't do it. I hope to use this method of separation until the whole play comes



together, and then maybe liking the show will be available for me! I am trying to trust the director and her vision, and trust it will all come together when I see the entire picture. Please, I want to be understood. I don't think I know more than her! It simply is not my style of show. That does not make it any less important.

To be honest, the smiling thing has helped a lot. Smiling helps release endorphins. I look around the studio and I think, 'Be happy. Be helpful for these guys. Be nice. Try not to explode!' So, that's where I am at.

### **December 10th: Initial Runs of the Show**

Going home for Christmas tomorrow! It makes rehearsal so much lighter for me. by that I guess I mean that it makes everything in life exciting, and anything that may be overwhelming or stressful just seems to be put in better perspective. I think this is healthy for me- to remember there is more to my life than being in a play or being an actor. Finding grounding techniques has been really important for me. Because previous rehearsals have been stressful and slightly tense, the room has been a perfect place for me to work on my actor challenge. haha. (glass half full here).

So, today we did two full runs of the show as it is. We didn't always have everyone because they were in and out for faculty meetings. It was so useful and I think it was a great way to end before Christmas. It set my mind at ease because I have an understanding of my trajectory- not so much character based yet. I am having trouble working with the concept. Again, not becoming overwhelmed with this situation has been really helpful for me. I am pushing myself to not need all the answers and just go with the flow. Anyway, what I meant was rehearsal today was great because now I know my physical movements in the show. It is going to an INSANE AMOUNT OF ENERGY. I like things like this because energy is something I have and that I can count on. Plus, there is no better feeling than being exhausted when you are done work. Once the show is running I think I will feel really satisfied at the end of the night because I will be physically exhausted.

In terms of being a bit confused by the character trajectory- it is hard to explain what I mean. Basically, because we are factory workers we haven't actually lived through any of these scenes we are playing out. I have asked Autumn in the past whether or not we have strong opinions on the characters our factory worker plays, and do we choose the scenes we are in or does the MC? To be honest the answers have been unclear. Fine. I need to just see what grows as time comes. I am trying to balance priorities here. I am hoping that once we start running the show over and over I will be able to create a backstory that runs through the whole show and serves my performance.

## **January 6th**

First day back to rehearsal after our big break. We were in the theatre today. It seems as though we have already begun to unravel. By that I mean, the group is generally disruptive and not entirely focused. I don't mean to say anyone is being rude but there is a lot of chaos and I think that may be just trickling through every facet of rehearsal. It is my feeling that people are not entirely happy to be doing this show, so they are trying their best to find a way to have fun in the room- which may mean a bit of carrying on. When it gets loud and chaotic and we are not accomplishing what we could the interloper in me wants to play the stage manager role and just bring us back together. This I sometimes do. I also sometimes am a culprit in the chaos, don't get me wrong. I am not not guilty. In fact, I don't think there is one person in the room who isn't.

Being on set was a good thing for me. I think the longer I have in the space, making it feel as though it is mine, the more confident I feel when the audience comes in. Maybe part of inviting the audience in is having a sense of ownership of the place they are coming in to. I hadn't actually articulated it this way before, and now that I am, I am taking a great deal of comfort in it.

One funny thing! Moving into the space I was completely turned around. I could not get into my head my exits and entrances, which previously I have been tracking quite well. I was tracking them well because this is something that makes me really stressed- not knowing where I am supposed to be going. I hate when I get to a point and I can't think of where I am meant to be next. So, today, I got it in my head that the set was backwards. It is hard to explain but I felt a little seed of panic beginning to grow in my stomach. But! I combatted it, and I didn't panic! Or become despondent or unpleasant, which has been the case in the past. I just told myself we have lots of time and whatever fear was beginning to grow in me was not rational and would only end up hurting my productivity in rehearsal, and my performance in the long run. I say it would have ended up having negative effects on my performance because in my experience with these feelings, if the seed of doubt is planted at any point throughout the rehearsal process it makes it increasingly hard for me to disassociate the two. So! I had a small miracle today and felt like I handled what I would normally go into a panic about.

It's funny, saying this all here makes me feel like nothing I panic about is a big deal. Sometimes it might just take putting the fear into words, stepping back and seeing it from a realistic vantage point.

## **January 14th**

Today we worked in the space while the lights were being worked on. I think the general energy of the group is high, even though people seem to be frustrated with the show as it is. Autumn is happy, and I am working to prioritize that. And again, it is helping me to work in a situation that is not ideal but not let my personal feelings get in the way with the professional situation.

Undeniably there have been a few moments where panic has begun to arise in me. I can feel myself starting to get overwhelmed with questions or frustrated with things not going the way I wanted them to. Today I became a little cloudy when I felt overstimulated while we incorporated the technical side of the show, as there are lots of technical elements that I hadn't anticipated. I then began to think about how soon we do the show, and how I will feel right before we do the show. However, I reminded myself I was in a safe and controlled environment. I also allowed myself to pretend that the audience were in the house, and this heightened my senses. There tends to be several people in the house during our rehearsals because this is a student production. I think introducing bodies to the space this early on will help me with accepting their presence.

### **January 18th.**

#### **Before First Preview:**

I am beginning to ride a little high and I can tell. My breath is coming in a bit clipped. We preview tonight and I am half excited and half scared. I know the reason I am getting nervous is because I don't feel excited to show what we've done- what I've done. But, you know, when I reflect upon the entire show I do feel proud. I feel like my work is good. I think it will continue to get better. Today, and each day this week, is NO JUDGMENT DAY.

So, No Judgment Day #1. What are my tasks?

- 1) Breathe. Breathe into the area of tension.
- 2) Lie on the floor and connect with my body.
- 3) Embrace my inner show-off

Yesterday when I felt a panic coming I just viewed what was happening from a realistic point of view and worked to keep myself grounded. It worked to a certain degree, to be honest. I know I may experience panic but I know even more confidently that if I do I WILL BE OKAY. It is natural. I will do a quick check-in, and refocus. I will remember to breathe and to show off what I have done. Yesterday I found Yvonne to be my grounding tool. When I felt I was losing myself a little, looking at her really helped to ground me, She experiences a similar reaction to me, and I just remember, 'We are doing this together'. Plus, focusing on my relationship to the MC helps me maintain my characters trajectory.

### **January 20th, Opening Night:**

So, I want to cover a lot of bases in this journal. I am hoping I don't leave anything out. Because for me, the good things sometimes overtake the bad: I tend to forget what didn't work or the periods where I had negative or unhappy feelings in favor of the times I had fun. Obviously my challenge focuses more on the dissection of what did not work. So, here goes. I know that at the beginning, or let's say, before the show started I was nervous. I was really nervous but I wasn't feeling like I was immersed in a nervous haze or fog like I usually am. I had a sense of stableness? or reality? that I did not have before the second preview (the night before). I was overwhelmed but with the noise coming from the girls dressing room. I am in the boys dressing

room because there are so few men but the wall between doesn't reach the ceiling. Regardless, this is my personal issue. They were all nervous, too, no doubt and for them it results in laughter and chatter. That isn't really what I need for my pre-show so I found a quiet studio and warmed up for a long time. I think the warm up was integral because I really felt like I was in my body. Erika taught us 'blood, breath, gravity' and it has been extremely helpful in grounding me when judgment creeps in.

As we were backstage I thought- why do I pretend I'm not nervous? Why do I pretend like I feel totally fine? I negate the experience by belittling it, making it unimportant. Why don't I just admit I'm nervous and then see what happens from there! See, I've always been pretending. I thought my nerves would hurt others but what I did was hurt them more by trying to turn my true feelings into disinterest or indifference- hoping it would help me feel better! Which never worked. So, I told people I was nervous. And you know what, I don't think I've ever said that aloud to anyone before a play before. So, tonight I said it. And I don't know exactly if it helped or not but I do know that it felt so much better to hear that other people were nervous, too. Of course they were! I feel as though I have been so selfish in the past, by not considering that the entire group would be feeling the same as me, to some degree.

When I was on stage I felt fairly calm for the entire run. There were points when I felt myself feeling uneasy but it was only in the beginning, and I don't want to give it too much weight, when I think the feelings were completely natural. I can't recall any one moment during the run where I felt myself grow exceptionally uneasy. When it was over I had a massive headache and I think it was due to the release of tension that had been growing during the past few weeks of rehearsal. However, I felt a sense of joy. Yes joy. I was very happy and very relieved. I think I am still a bit overcome by the whole thing but not in a bad way.

### **January 24th: CLOSING NIGHT:**

Closing afternoon, I should say. First of all, I love closing on a matinee. I can't articulate why, but I just do.

So, before the show how did I feel? I felt.. slightly distant. Like, I couldn't believe we were doing the show that day. I did a 45 minute warm up and I felt really ready physically (in spite of all my cuts and bruises). My voice, however, was tired and I am happy that we will have a day off tomorrow! I have been taking good care of my voice and doing a good warm up before each show. I think I maybe do not always know how to maintain the work we have learned from David while I am dealing with the adrenaline of a show. So, I am trying to take that with me into the next shows I do. I think I need work to incorporate more safe practices vocally early on in rehearsal, rather than just calling on them during the run of the show.

I have lots to say and it is generally all positive. The last 3 shows we did (two on Friday, one on Saturday) were genuinely so much fun. I knew I would have fun doing the actual run of this show, though rehearsal was sometimes not the easiest. I think part of what contributed to my being able to enjoy this show and not fall into patterns of panic was how physically exhausting it was. I think I had so little time to reflect emotionally or mentally on what was going on, that I

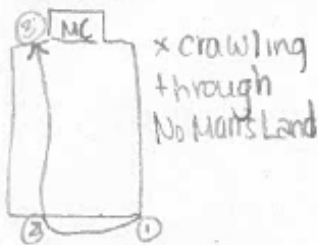
did not fall into my regular traps. I always had something to do, something to accomplish physically.

This being said, when I was enter for a scene that did take breath, and was not rushed, there were a few instances when panic began to creep in. However, I feel truly relieved because I think the foundation I placed for myself really did help me. I always quickly reminded myself of my characters task, or action, and where I was at that point in accomplishing it, and quickly I became distracted by my job, and forgot about the fear that began to creep up.

EX. A part of the play where I have to rally the men to offer to join the army. A few times while doing this scene my critical self jumped in and wondered would the audience have any idea what was going on during this part of the play. But I quickly told myself, that was out of my hands now, and the structure had never been my choice to make. My job was simple: rally the men. My tactics were to excite, guilt, plead, entice. When I began to judge I changed my train of thought back to ‘excite them, excite them!’ and without having to really do much else, the fear did not become uncontrollable.

However, there were portions of the play where I really was just meant to stand in one place and not be a distraction. Two times during the run I felt myself began to question a bunch of things about the play, and whether or not the audience was understanding what was happening. I can tell myself all I want that this is not my business but I still feel like it. So, to avoid dizziness or disorientation, I would remind myself of blood, breath, gravity. This is something Erika talked a lot about last semester in movement. Feel you blood, your breath, and check in with gravity. This did not make much sense to me at first, but checking in with those three things that I can always rely on to be there, was very helpful for me. I am so glad to have this tool in my toolbox when I cannot rely on my actor preparation.

## Blocking



## Primary Objective

→ Capture the 10<sup>th</sup> enemy trench

## Obstacle

- ① Hunger / Fatigue
  - ② being attacked by enemy
- What can we see?

mud, blown up trees, bodies,  
barbed wire, rats  
smell?

blood, dirt, feces, rotting,

## feel?

cold, wet, sweaty, tired, hungry,  
fingers and shoes soaked  
teeth, hair, face dirty

When we reach the trench I  
am so elated. It is the relief  
of safety and celebration of  
success.

## How To Get what I want?

move Fast

be brave

Keep eyes open for all dangers

Act Two 61

**British General** They've just got off the train. Most of them haven't eaten for forty-eight hours -

**Haig** They are moving against a weakened and demoralised enemy. Capture the German line, without further delay.

*Three Irish Soldiers, one of them a Sergeant, enter. They wear English army caps and, over their Pierrot costumes, plain green kilts. The First Soldier carries a Union Jack on a pole. They must be good dancers.*

**Sergeant** Right boys, up and at 'em! Get across

**First and Second Soldier** Up the Irish! to motivate

**Band**

IRISH WASHERWOMAN

*All three dance on - advance based on the jig. The Irish Washerwoman played on the pipes. The flag is carried high. Bombardment. They fling themselves down, having reached their goal. The bagpipes fade. Birdsong.*

**Sergeant** We made it.

**First Soldier** Where are we, Serg?

**Sergeant** I reckon we've broken into a hull.

**Second Soldier** Lovely, is it not? Peaceful.

**First Soldier** Peaceful? An' what's that dirty great mound of earth confrontin' us?

**Sergeant** Isn't it an earthwork then? An' near enough to protect us.

*Sniper's bullet.*

**First Soldier** What was that?

**Sergeant** Must have been a stray one. All the same, keep your heads down, fellers. You see, the trouble is, we've been fightin' too well. We've arrived ahead of ourselves.

**First Soldier** How many trenches did we capture, Serg?

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Sergeant About nine, I reckon.

Second Soldier Ten. great / congratulate

Sergeant Make it a round dozen an' we'll be mentioned in dispatches!

Second Soldier We'll be heroes. to excite

② First Soldier 'Twill be one up for the Irish Fusiliers!

Distant birding ???

Second Soldier What was that, Serg?

Sergeant What was what?

Second Soldier Sounded like someone callin'.

Sergeant Where?

Second Soldier Beyond the mound.

First Soldier It'll be Limey wounded. A lot fell in that last attack ... in that shell hole over there.

Second Soldier There it is again. attract attention to

They all listen.

Sergeant (repeating what he hears) 'Come back. Come back, you bloody fools.'

③A Second Soldier He's telling us to go back?

Sergeant (calls) Tanks, mush! Get that flag down!

First Soldier Get back thro' all that? Easier said than done.

Sergeant Shut up. (He listens.) He says we're drawin' their fire.

③B Sniper's bullet !!!!!

First Soldier Where did that come from?

Sergeant Bejasus, that was one of ours. To inform

Second Soldier (shouts) Don't shoot, it's us. There's

## ② Bird Song Beat

I need the Serg to tell us what the birding message is.

Quiet him! I can hear it again!

## ③A Find out the problem.

x Why in the hell would we go back through No Man's Land?

Key: one of ours:

they are shooting at us. "we" are shooting at us.

x it is one thing to die during a battle. It is another to be shot by men on your own side. THE BRITISH of all people.



x Objective: Not die

x Obstacle: they don't know it's us.

x tactic: INFORM THEM!

④ Someone Runs Back

He will die.

No, he won't.  
We've made  
it through  
worse. Take a  
hit.

④B The Bridge

He is being  
targeted by  
snipers. My buddy.

⑤ Watch Seamus Sink

⑥ I'll Run

Will I?...

Of course I will.

If Seamus had to die  
for this, it can't be  
for nothing.

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human beings over here! to call attention to!

Heavy gunfire. They flatten themselves. ] TO STOP THEM!

④ Sergeant Now see what you've done, you bloody cajt! Seamus!

First Soldier Serg?

Sergeant You're quick on your pins. Get back to H.Q. I made it worse when I stood up and yelled.

Pronto! Tell the artillery to raise their bloody sights a bit an' -

First Soldier Back through all that?

Sergeant - save their shells for Jerry.

First Soldier On me own?

Sergeant It's hard to give ground now we've got so near our goal. agree

First Soldier I see that. You want me to tell 'em we've won.

Sergeant Do that!

First Soldier The battle's won.

And tentatively he makes his way upstage and stops.

④B First Soldier (calls quietly) Hey, Serg! That last one got the bridge.

Second Soldier That means we're cut off. ] GRAVE.

Sergeant (calls quietly) Give yourself a treat! Swim for it. (The Sergeant and the Second Soldier watch, listen.) That'll be the first bath he's had this year. (He watches, then whistles.) Seamus! Bring us back a bottle of whiskey ... Irish.

⑤ Sniper's bullet. to digest

Second Soldier He's gone under, Serg.

Sergeant (crosses himself) Yeah, they got him. (He looks at the Second Soldier.) Well, someone's got to go.

⑥ Second Soldier Sure. to accept



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**Sergeant** Seamus is gone. (A pause.) They'll think there's hundreds of us here.

**Second Soldier** I could sprint that half a mile back in no time.

**Sergeant** Get yourself a medal! (The Second Soldier leaps up and away. Sniper's bullet.) Well if he's got shot, I'll kill him. (Heavy gunfire.) There they go! That's the bloody mad English, shelling for the next attack. (Heavy gunfire and explosion.) Don't shoot, it's us! Stop firing! (Sniper's bullet. The Sergeant slowly twists round, wounded. He puts his hands up.) Kamerad! Kamerad! (A strain of 'The Irish Washerwoman' is reprised faintly and slowly as, turning and turning, the Sergeant moves towards darkness. As he goes.) It's not so bad. After all, I'll escape the whole bloomin' war. *Ugh! Stop! Stop!*

The M.C. comes on and sets a speaker's stand for Mrs Pankhurst. During the scene he stands at the edge of the crowd, a silent observer. Mrs Pankhurst enters, followed by a straggling crowd. As she steps up on to the stand one or two of the Men whistle.

**Mrs Pankhurst** Now before talking to you all, I should like to read you a letter from my friend George Bernard Shaw.

**First Man** (shouts) Who's 'e when 'e's at 'ome?

**Mrs Pankhurst** He says, 'The men of this country are being sacrificed to the blunders of boobies, the cupidity of capitalists -

**First Woman** (aside) What's she talking abaht?

**Mrs Pankhurst** - the ambition of conquerors, the lusts and lies -

**Second Woman** (on the word 'lusts') Oo-er!

**Mrs Pankhurst** - and rancours of bloodthirsty men who love war because it opens their prison doors and sets them on the throne of power and popularity.'

**Second Man** (shouts) Now give us a song!

to reassure } Both myself  
to bolster } and Serg.

Objective: Make him  
think you'll  
make it.

Obstacle: I don't  
know that I will.  
convince, bolster,  
assure myself  
AND Serg.

→ Swing between  
terror and  
hope

→ swing between  
determination and  
cowardness

Satirical  
because we are on  
P.'s side.